In 2018, the global agricultural land area was 4.8 billion hectares, down 2 percent, or 0.08 billion ha compared with 2000 (see Figure 3). Between 2000 and 2018, roughly two-thirds of agricultural land were used for permanent meadows and pastures (3.2 billion ha), which declined by 5 percent (0.15 billion ha). One-third of the total agricultural land was cropland (1.6 billion ha), which increased by 5 percent (0.07 billion ha). Although agricultural land decreased since 2000, it increased on average by 0.1 percent each year over the 1961–2018 period, with a significant expansion up to the 1990s.

The regional breakdown of the global cropland area varied marginally between 2000 and 2018 (see Figure 4). Asia had the largest share of the global cropland area in 2018 (38 percent), followed by the Americas (24 percent), Europe (18 percent), Africa (18 percent) and Oceania (2 percent). Nonetheless, there were differences in cropland expansion in the different regions during this period – Oceania and Africa both had rapid growth in cropland area (25 percent and 21 percent, respectively), while Asia had more moderate growth (5 percent). The cropland area of the Americas remained more or less stable during this period, while Europe was the only region to reduce the amount of land area devoted to crops.

Approximately 30 percent of global cropland and permanent meadows and pastures can be found in three countries (see Figure 5), which are not necessarily the ones with the largest country area.

In 2018, 12 percent of global permanent meadows and pastures belonged to China, 10 percent to Australia, and 8 percent to the United States. It rose marginally in Africa from 14.3 percent to 15.8 percent. This trend, which is seldom observed, is due to increases in the GDP share of agriculture in a number of countries – Algeria, Angola, Chad, the Congo, Eritrea, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. These countries account for about half the total value added from agriculture, forestry and fishing in Africa in 2018 (see Table 2). Despite its relatively small economic size, the sector plays a crucial role in the agro-industry value chain and in the use of natural resources. As such, agriculture affects the quality of the environment and food security beyond what its contribution to GDP indicates.

Source: FAOSTAT
Note: Percentages on the figure indicate the shares in the total.

https://doi.org/10.4060/cb1329en-fig03